

Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans

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Executive Summary

Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans has a mission and passion to help veterans receive the healthcare that they need and deserve. By pairing veterans with an assistant who is knowledgeable in the healthcare realm we will work with both the veteran and the internal structures of the VA to streamline and customize the care that the veteran receives ending the endless loop of visits with no answers and no resolution to their medical issues. Taking advocacy for the veteran and their healthcare out of the hands of the VA and putting the ability to advocate for the veteran in the hands of someone knowledgeable in healthcare we will work to make sure the veteran is no longer reduced to their last name and the last 4 of the social security number but instead are a valued member of their own healthcare team.

Our target demographic is the approximately 6,500 veterans between The Villages and Gainesville that could benefit from our services. While this is a percentage of the overall market it is a large percentage and offers us a wealth of opportunities to help veterans. An initial investment would allow us to set up our office as well as begin outreach into the areas where veterans gather to let them know of this opportunity to be a part of their healthcare team. By reaching out into the community we can talk with veterans about their healthcare, pair them with an assistant that they get along with and begin the process of putting their healthcare back into their hands.

We are a non-profit organization so our milestones will be each and every veteran who receives a resolution to a healthcare issue, who receives better care than they were getting before, and when we begin to expand out past The Villages and Gainesville areas. Our goal is to become a national organization helping veterans with their healthcare.

Introduction

Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans came to fruition after assisting my partner with her healthcare and navigating the Veterans Administration (VA) healthcare system. Through a series of events, she needed greater assistance with getting to appointments and to the emergency department. One visit resulted in her care being mishandled and I needed to follow the chain to take further action to resolve the issues with her care and the provider that saw her. Using my knowledge of healthcare facilities and how and when to bypass specific portions of the chain I was able to expedite the resolution and make advancements in the process of her treatments.

Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans has the mission to help veterans navigate a complex bureaucratic system to obtain the treatment that they need. Utilizing a network of assistants that have a knowledge of healthcare systems and the ability to speak in the same language of the people standing in the way of the veterans' healthcare to advance the care received by veterans across the board. Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans will offer veterans an assistant that can travel to appointments to take notes, ask questions to clarify information for the veteran, navigate invoking internal patient advocate and potentially escalating higher. These assistants will be put in a position to have conversations on behalf of and with the veteran present to streamline the process of receiving treatment.

Currently veterans get lost in a system of being passed around. The common phrase is that the primary care physician (PCP) is the hub of all communication, but the PCP office does not seem to have a lot of knowledge as to what other departments in the VA do and in some cases what their own department is responsible for. This lack of knowledge causes there to be an endless loop of the veteran being pushed from one department to another without getting solid answers or actual treatment. Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans seeks to end the endless loop and help get the veteran to the department or person that they truly need to be seen by. Working to streamline the veteran's care

should also help to free up VA resources and reduce the strain on the various departments that are understaffed and overwhelmed due to erroneous scheduling.

Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans strives to be a low-cost solution for veterans seeking resolution and solutions for their healthcare treatments. Any payments for services would be at a level of what the veteran can afford to pay. Initial funding for Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans would need to come from grants and small business loans, with the ultimate goal of Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans being able to provide pro bono services as needed for veterans on restricted incomes. Services will be available for all veterans who receive their care at a VA facility.

Business Description

Talk to almost any veteran and you get to hear stories, not about their time serving, but about their time trying to get treatment at the VA. While there are some positive stories out there, there are more stories about the lackluster treatment, the lack of treatment, or the scheduling issues. Stories such as Andrew's, an Army Veteran from Colorado

“as far as [doctors] go, I'm on 3rd VA Doc here in Colorado Springs as they never listen, never really look, have yet to get a blood draw or even looked at by a specialist. I've gone to the ER, both VA and non-VA and it's the same thing. I need to see a certain specialist, and the VA shuts it down.”

Or Ann, an Air Force Veteran from North Carolina

“I'm now using my private insurance and paying a \$30 copay every week just to get the care I need because the VA was incapable or unwilling to get care for me.”

(Concerned Veterans for America, 2023)

My own story as a Veteran caregiver when trying to contact the patient advocate regarding the mistreatment of my partner by an ER physician. After a week where both of us left messages both verbal and electronic asking to be called back, I had to call the director of the facility to lodge my complaint regarding the physician's unwillingness to listen to the acute concerns of my partner and then calling armed security on a woman who was crying and asking for help, having said one curse word in the course of conversation.

Issues of mistreatment by VA caregivers isn't confined to clinics or the emergency room; In an article written for the Billings Gazette by Chris Jorgensen (2023), he details about a Montana VA Community Living Center (CLC) was shut down after inspections uncovered allegations of mistreatment, including the case of an elderly veteran who was sent to the CLC for 9 days following a month long stay

at a VA facility. After he was discharged from the CLC the veteran was readmitted to the intensive care unit where he was diagnosed with a lung mass that was stage-four metastatic cancer. The patient died 9 days later. The article goes on to give additional information from the inspections of the CLC, in 2018 there were confirmed claims of nursing staff mistreating a patient. And in 2020 CLC staff were observed “exhibiting behaviors consistent with patient abuse and neglect” (para 13).

Helping Hands Advocacy for Veterans seeks to change these outcomes and increase the level of care for all veterans who wish or need to seek treatment at VA facilities. By hiring assistants that have medical knowledge – be it nursing, medical coding, or some other medical knowledge combined with the knowledge of how a medical facility works, we will strive to help streamline the veteran’s care, cut through some of the constant shuffling from one provider to another with no answers, and give dignity back to the veteran with their healthcare. Veterans would meet with the available assistants and be paired with an assistant with whom they get along with well.

Our assistants would be available to go with the veteran to appointments—to take notes and to help the veteran articulate their concerns, and with approval from the veteran; have conversations on the veterans’ behalf both with the veteran and independently of the veteran if needed. Assistants would also be available to go with the veteran to procedure appointments and would readily be available to meet the veteran in the emergency room to help coordinate care. Should an internal patient advocate be needed our assistants will be empowered to make those calls and handle those conversations and know appropriate times to escalate to higher authorities to get the veteran the appropriate care.

The goal of Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans is to be a non-profit organization and my partner and I would be co-owners of the business. Initial funding would come from grants such as Amber Grants for myself and Veteran Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship (V-WISE) for her. In addition to offering the opportunities for donations to allow us to hire more assistants to help a larger

number of veterans. While services will be offered for free, there will be the option for veterans that want to pay to have a low-cost payment that is either based on their income or what they can afford to pay. All monies paid into the business would be re-invested into hiring assistants or providing pro-bono services for a veteran who is unable to pay.

As you can see, Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans is a much-needed organization, both for veterans as well as families. Taking into consideration the quotes at the beginning, for Andrew we would have worked to ensure that the provider was listening to him, that he felt heard, worked to ensure that he was getting his referral to specialist that was needed and that the specialist was scheduling appropriately. We also would have invoked the patient advocate to address the providers that were not listening to the patient and delaying his treatment. In Ann's case, she didn't go into specifics, but the commentary of not receiving treatment because the VA was unwilling or unable to, we would have worked to get her into the providers that she needed to see to get her treatments. In my own story, after the phone call to the facilities director, there have been several conversations with the patient advocate which led to a conversation with the facility ER Chief to formally lodge a complaint against the provider for the mistreatment.


Having a knowledge of the inner workings and hierarchies of a medical facility are key to the success of the organization. Knowing the proper way to work for patients is also key to the success of the organization. A desire to help veterans receive and thrive with the care they deserve is the driving factor.

Market Analysis

The long-term strategic goal for Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans is to become a national network of advocates, however, to start we will focus on Central and Northern Florida, and veterans seeking care at the VA facilities in The Villages and Gainesville Florida. The facility in The Villages offers several services, however, they routinely refer patients to the larger facility in Gainesville for specialized care or services that The Villages cannot provide. There are many retirees in this area, as well as many veterans that utilize services. According to the Us Census for 2017-2021 there are 14,859 identified veterans in The Villages and in Gainesville there are 6,157 veterans (United States Census Bureau QuickFacts, n.d.), while not all of them are going to utilize services at the VA facilities, approximately 62% of veterans have utilized VA services since October 2021 (US Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration, n.d.) so there is a large market segment that could potentially take advantages of the services offered by Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans. If Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans targets 50% of the of the population using VA services that would be 4,606 potential clients in The Villages and 1,908 in Gainesville.

For the specific services that Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans provides there is no direct competition as there are no companies outside the VA that offer veteran advocacy services. The goal would be to become allies with the internal patient advocate group at both locations so that there is a symbiotic working relationship. This would allow Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans to easily give information to the internal patient advocates and receive referrals from the internal patient advocate group when they identify a patient that would benefit from our services. Fostering relationships with other organizations such as Operation Stand Down would be important since they focus on the homeless veteran population which would add to the target population of Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans and expand our total market.

Strengths of Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans would be our knowledge of the healthcare system as well as learned knowledge of navigating the VA services along with clinical knowledge to understand how to ask the right questions and streamline the veterans’ care. Weaknesses would be hiring enough people to cover the demand for services and not overloading assistants, finding assistants with the knowledge needed to advocate for veterans, and startup costs for paying employees for their time in advocating. Opportunities would consist of partnering with other organizations, such as Operation Stand Down, the VFW, or the Wounded Warrior Project, creating partnerships with internal patient advocate groups, the future could evolve into offering just transportation services, expanding into helping with disability claims and ratings through these partnerships. Threats would come from the internal patient advocate group not being willing to work with us in a symbiotic manner, resistance from veterans in receiving assistance, other volunteer organizations encroaching on our target market.

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare knowledge • VA system knowledge • Clinical knowledge • Passion for helping Veterans 		<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring quality assistants • Cash flow
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnering with other volunteer services • Transportation services • Disability and rating assistance 		<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal patient advocate group • Veteran resistance • Other volunteer organizations

Financial Plan

STARTUP COSTS – HELPING HAND: ADVOCACY FOR VETERANS				
Prepared: 19March2023				
COST ITEMS		BUDGET		DETAIL
ADMINISTRATIVE/GENERAL				
501C Nonprofit		\$125.00		Filing and registered agent fee
Legal		\$359		Use of Legal Zoom for 501C Paperwork
Legal		\$588		Monthly legal zoom attorney
Grant Filing Fees		\$105		
Software Intuit Quick Books		\$510.00		5 users
Software Office 365 Subscription		\$132.00		
Liability Insurance		\$540		Estimated \$45/month
LOCATION/OFFICE				
Cell phone – Tax Write off for personal cell phone		\$100.00		
Hardware Remarkable Tablets		\$1,322		
Hardware Work laptops		\$1,600		
Hardware External Hard drive storage		\$115.99		
Hardware Printer Scanner Copier		\$599.99		
Technical IT support		\$3,600		
MARKETING				
Logo, branding, website		\$1000		
Website Maintenance		\$1,800		\$150/month
SSL Website Certification		\$300		
Website Hosting Fees		\$240		
Printed Marketing Materials		\$843		Flyers and Brochures
Trade Shows		\$1,500		Additional flyers/brochures, table fees
LABOR EXPENSES				
Payroll		\$44,928		2 assistants \$12/hour, 36-hour work week
OTHER				
Contingency Fund		\$3,000		
ESTIMATED START-UP BUDGET		\$63,308		

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES – HELPING HAND: ADVOCACY FOR VETERANS				
Prepared 19March2023				
REVENUE		AMOUNT		DETAIL
Restricted Contributions				

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES – HELPING HAND: ADVOCACY FOR VETERANS				
Prepared 19March2023				
REVENUE		AMOUNT		DETAIL
Angel Investor Hivers and Strivers 1 time investment		\$50,000		
Amber Grant – 1 time grant		\$10,000		
V-WISE Grant – 1 time grant		\$10,000		
Contributions – Foundation – Street Shares – 1 time contribution		\$15,000		
Unrestricted Contributions				
Contributions – Individual		\$10,000		
Contributions – Organization		\$20,000		
Program Revenue by Source				
Sliding Scale Payment		\$5,000		
Estimated Startup Revenue		\$120,000		
EXPENSES		AMOUNT		DETAIL
Program Expenses				
Marketing, website, tradeshow		\$6,433		
Management/Admin Expenses				
Set up costs		\$2,359		
Office Supplies		\$7,338		
Contingency Fund		\$3,000		
Uncategorized Expenses				
Wages		\$44,928.00		
Estimated Startup Expenses		\$64,058		
Estimated Change in Net Assets		\$55,942		

While most of the numbers are true based on research, we are assuming on revenue side of the Statement of Activities when it comes to the angel investment and grants as those are awards based on a review by the committees that service those entities. As my business partner is a female disabled veteran there are additional grants that she would qualify for through the VA and other grant companies that we can and will be investigating, however, they did not have grant award amounts listed to be able to add them for the purpose of this statement. We are also assuming on the funds from the sliding scale payment model. We do feel that most veterans that will engage our services would be on a fixed income and may not be able to fit into a sliding scale payment plan but would still receive services.

We plan to use the monies still in the account to hire a third assistant as well as equipment for them – a laptop and remarkable tablet. We feel the remarkable tablets are the best option for taking notes as there is an option in the software to convert the handwriting to text and then be able to email those notes to the client as well as add into the ongoing file created for each client for consistency. Hiring a third assistant would be an added cost of \$23, 925 for the year with their salary, laptop, and tablet to get them started. We will also be investigating to see if there is an EMR style program available where we can store client documentation or if we will need to have a program created for us to allow us to have full continuity of information for our clients should their assistant not be able to make an appointment then another assistant can step in and still serve our client without losing information.

Operation Plan/Implementation Plan

The primary goal for Helping Hand: Advocacy for Veterans is to become a leader in the Veteran community for advocacy, helping veterans navigate and streamline their healthcare. Strategically we are focused on the Gainesville and The Villages region with the additional goal to expand as far as we can to help as many veterans as we can. Working with external and internal partnerships to achieve these goals is important. Keeping that primary goal in mind, the first step for Helping Hand: Advocacy for Veterans is to obtain their 501C nonprofit status. Without this status we are unable to apply for specific grants and investors.

Working with Legal Zoom to set up the 501C status will also give us access to attorneys to set up any NDA paperwork we need as well as our HIPPA disclosure paperwork and new employee contracts. Once the 501C status has been obtained we can apply for grants and look for an investor. There is a plethora of grants available for disabled female veterans, and grants for female owned small business. Having an angel investor is also a key factor since there are different options such as a direct influx of funds or working capital that could be arranged to lengthen the timeframe in which funds are coming into the business.

While this is happening, we will be reaching out to create our external partnerships. Collaborating with existing veteran services we can create a larger network so reaching out to the area VGWs, seeing if there is an Operation Stand Down office in the area as well as reaching out to Wounded Warriors to add marketing value as well as the partnership is going to be valuable, we can utilize resources they already have in place and we can be a referral opportunity for them as well if they have a Veteran that we will be able to assist with their healthcare. Once the grants and investors are on board, we can begin getting the office technology in place.

Each assistant will have a laptop and Remarkable tablet. Remarkable tablets allow for ease in taking notes as well as the ability to send the handwritten notes in a text format that can be store and shared with the veteran at their request to keep a continuity of care available. Laptops and an external hard drive will provide initial storage of documentation while investigating the options for cloud storage for client documentation so that assistants can have access to notes if needed to assist another assistant.

Our assistants need to be knowledgeable in healthcare to know the hierarchy of a facility to better assist in streamlining the veteran’s care. Utilizing this knowledge will be key, knowing when to escalate an issue is also key. They also need to have the people skills to be able to forge relationships with outside partners as well as internal relationships with VA based patient advocates and providers to facilitate helping the veteran receive the care they need. Ideally the assistants would come with this knowledge, however, on-the-job training is also a good way to obtain this knowledge. Shadowing would be the best training method. In addition, there would be monthly meetings so that assistants are able to share different scenarios and have round table discussions on how each scenario could be handled for the optimal resolution and to share information they have uncovered to help other assistants and their clients. While the veteran client is our most important stakeholder, there are some additional stakeholders in the company.

Stakeholder	Role
Owners	Control day to day operations as well as work as client assistants
Accountant	Review budgets and make necessary recommendations based on funds available
Assistants	Work with clients, review converted notes for accuracy, maintain continuity of care by taking inclusive notes
Veteran	Client utilizing services, our most important stakeholder
Relationship partners	Refer veterans to us as well as have networks we can utilize

Conclusion

We have a clear direction and a clear mission: to help veterans receive the care they need and deserve. We will be their sister, their brother, their long-lost cousin to assist the veteran with any of their healthcare needs. We will pair assistants with veterans to ensure a good working arrangement, however, all assistants will be available to step in should an alternative be needed. By having a secure cloud-based system for documentation gathered at appointments and alternative assistant would have the information at their fingertips to be able to step in and assist the veteran at any time.

We cannot complete our mission on our own, however, we need our help to work towards our goal of being a national organization assisting veterans. That goal starts locally and will expand over time, but to expand we must first start. Your investment will ensure that veterans have a fighter in their corner, one that is focused on their well-being and health and gives the veteran dignity by being a part of their own healthcare team.

Please consider investing in Helping Hands: Advocacy for Veterans and give veterans back their healthcare.

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